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Fall 2019

# House and Family:

A Taxonomic Sorting of King Lear

Into the Harry Potter Houses

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HOUSE AND FAMILY: a TAXONOMIC SORTING OF KING LEAR  
INTO THE HARRY POTTER HOUSES

A thesis submitted to  
the Regis College  
English Department  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of a Masters Degree

by Thomas Kris Karli

November 2019

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# House and Family:

## A Taxonomic Sorting of King Lear

### Into the Harry Potter Houses

#### I. Abstract

The intention of this research is to establish the idea of a standard Four Person grouping in literature. In many modern stories, the ensemble holds a special place in people's hearts, especially if they identify specifically with a certain member of the ensemble. This allows friend groups to debate placement and discuss their roles, all while appealing to our sublimated desperation to belong and to be represented. This paper will examine perhaps the most ubiquitous separation of fictional characters into four groups, the sorting of the Hogwarts Houses in Harry Potter. This thesis posits that sorting is based on determinable and reproducible factors, and that these factors are universal throughout groupings in Western literature. The thesis will first posit a sorting system to divide the Houses that is specific and upheld by the literature, the actions of the characters in each House, and the words of the author outside of the literature and second, the thesis will then attempt to 'sort' a collection of four other characters from Shakespeare's *King Lear*. It will analyze the characters from the perspective of their motivations, their actions, and their words, and see if they fall naturally into the same divisions as the Hogwarts Houses. This will be a test case for the theory that literary groupings of four will naturally arrange themselves into these groupings. Finally, the

thesis will examine the implications of the sorting system, its veracity, and if it works to sort the characters of both the books and the test case.

## II. Introduction

There are few writers more well known than JK Rowling and William Shakespeare. JK Rowling's wizarding world is ubiquitous and known to almost the entire world, giving a shot in the arm to reading in general and children's literature specifically in the past two decades. Shakespeare, on the other hand, is among the most read and quoted writer of all time, and considered to be the peak of past sophistication, especially by those unfamiliar with his work and context. Modern readers often find very little comparable between the two, save that they are literary and popular. Aside from their ubiquity, they two writers also sport a memorable and moderately diverse cast of characters to populate their stories worlds, and the characters are generally dynamic and fascinating. Even malevolent characters that would be poorly used by lesser writers are often given motivation and agency in their sometimes petty and sometimes grand pursuits of their aims.

One of the things that has captured people's imaginations in Rowling's work (besides the adventures of a singular very special child) is the system of grouping the children at Hogwarts. It is possible that the fascination comes from the fact that the House system is completely foreign to non-English people. Other places rarely sort their students into competing groups. It could also be the devotion to specific virtues that draw interest. Most non-religious people don't see devotion in characters or even other people. It may even be the call to tribalism that seems to rest in all of us these days, a desperation to have a group to identify, that shares our characteristics and compliments our abilities. These are currently being exploited by everything from the weekly astrological report that newspapers run to

large corporations performing personality tests before employment can occur with everyone from computer hiveminds to the United States government. Whatever the cause, many of us find this taxonomy fascinating, drawing lines in the sand and defending our imaginary allegiance vociferously.

One of the myriad problems with simpler personality testing and astrology is that attempting to bind a diverse and dynamic human subject to a single archetype or trait will generally fail. People are often too complex to predict with a rudimentary understanding of their primary motivation or learning style, and even the rare self-aware person doesn't usually know themselves well enough to tell you what works for them. Large scale personality tests (often with dozens, if not hundreds of questions) can be used generally in hiring practice or teaching to establish a preliminary baseline, but almost never work as long-term predictors of performance or behavior. People are simply too complex to understand and often have conflicting motivations that disrupt them behaving in a manner that makes sense with so simple a model. This is not true of many literary characters. Even the most complex literary characters, if well written, can be expected to make sense and behave consistently in a way that no human being does.

Before the creation of modern germ theory, health was 'known' to be based on the four humors of the body and their combinations and balances. People were generally known to favor a certain one which defined their practices and behaviors. The four humours were: blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm. Differing concentrations of these determined whether one was sick or healthy, and what means of cure might be devised. They also, in the long-term, described personality. While germ theory disposed us of these notions, they were still important to learning methods, and the Waldorf education system as well as androsophy rely on them for differentiation. They have also inspired many writers and researchers examining characterization.

In my literary and media studies, I have noticed many groupings of four that seem to follow the personality traits of the Houses from Hogwarts in the Harry Potter books. Almost all modern ensemble stories contain a four person banding. Everything from comic books including *Archie* and the *Fantastic Four*, modern literature like *The Wizard of Oz* and *Peter Pan*, and even television shows like *The A-Team* and *The Golden Girls* have a band of four representing their protagonist. While all of these are more modern and examine ensemble casts of comics, stage, and screen, some few older works contain the diversity of character to have a four person ensemble. Works like *The Three Musketeers*, *Little Women*, and *King Lear* each contain a set of four people who seem to have the same divides that the Harry Potter Houses manifest. One of the most striking of these is the children of King Lear, in which the Fool behaves as an adopted child. This division of characters along the elemental lines of the four humours has become a literary shorthand. It was this literary shorthand that seems ubiquitous, of the four character types, that was fascinating to me.

This research project will attempt to establish the basis for an examination of the Four Man Band as a tool for literary analysis. First, I will use a close reading of the Harry Potter books to establish the bounds of the individual Houses and their descriptors, through the virtues they espouse and what those virtues suggest about them. Next, I will make a close reading of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, to determine the nature of the characters of King Lear's children through their actions and words. I will use those to determine whether the characters are analogous to the Houses, and if that allows for a wider examination of other ensembles. I will also make an analysis of ancillary writings on both works to establish connections between the two as best as can be done. It is my hope that these steps will allow that a connection can be made, and I can begin laying the groundwork to establishing this grouping as a modern literary shorthand.

## II. 1. Purpose and Value



There is a void in current literature. This is the statement that has launched a thousand papers. Examination of a lack is where literary theory starts. That's why this paper is not about a sorting system. It is an examination of why we don't examine characters based on their motivation. It is an attempt to examine why we don't acknowledge that a character's virtues and values, hopes and desires, define that character, both in the role that they play and the direction and power of their drive to their motivations.

A well-written character can be defined by the genre of the literature they inhabit. Most readers and researchers are familiar with the difference between a fantasy hero and a noir hero, and in that way, genre defines the character. The genre establishes parameters that its heroes follow. Characters can also be defined by their role within the story. Modern literature courses define and examine the purpose and roles of a protagonist, a love interest, a sidekick, a villain, a foil. Their purpose to the story and value to its ends defines these roles. Characters can be defined by their journey, their beginning, or their end. They can be defined as an archetype or a metaphor or by their fatal flaw. There are so many ways to define them by what they do and what purpose they serve, but much of literary theory ignores the fact that they are supposed to inhabit a world and not a single story. It ignores that characters have relationships and internal purpose beyond their singular role in a singular story. Despite the fact that a reader may only examine a small portion of a character's life, that life is established to have existed before the reader arrived, and sequels suggest that it can continue after the reader has left. Many modern stories are not possessed of the unities of ancient stories, which limited the actions of the play to single time, scene, and action. The characters within them interact in ways that are not always directly aimed at a salutary solution to the problem at hand. The lack that I am talking about is a way to classify literary characters to understand their motivations, their actions, and their purpose, and to see them as a more

complex set of characteristics, not cast aside when their role in an individual story is done and we are done with them.

Currently, the only common way to understand literary characters is based on their role or archetype. Characters are a short set of adjectives, with perhaps a singular noun to declare their role or allegiance. Slightly more effort might be placed into it if they are a singular protagonist with shallow characters resembling bound fetishes to serve their stories. If such characters are singular protagonists, starting with the research of the hero's journey by Joseph Campbell, and descending from there, we can analyze a character's journey in a way that makes it meaningful and recognizable. Tragically, it still doesn't often examine more than briefly what drives them. Character motivation is lacking from many stories, and we often see it more in characters with no agency, little more than objects or deus ex machina for the plot and author. These characters are defined as little more than puppets, and are generally unsatisfying and even frustrating for their audiences. Characters serve the plot and not their own interests.

Similarly, analysis by role also doesn't work with most serial media, stories with more than a singular defining pursuit or quest. Serial media often have multiple story arcs, allowing for a shift in dynamic, sometimes allowing different characters to come to the forefront and following multiple threads to allow for deeper connection and more effective and realistic story-telling. Many characters will grow and assume different roles, being a protagonist in one arc and a foil in another, being antagonistic in a single story while returning to a sidekick role to support their friend again once the crisis has passed. This can be a problem as some authors lose the identity of the characters in these changes, making a singular character have a lack of continuity over time, losing the spirit of the character and the cohesion of the story. Often, this ends with the new version of the character feeling like a different person with the same name, serving a new role. For the sake of continuity and

internal consistency in story-telling, characters need a way to identify that doesn't get left behind as the story changes over time.

Finally, analysis by role also doesn't work with ensembles. In Campbell's analysis, a singular protagonist experiences all the milestones and all of the growth. In stories with multiple protagonists, this disrupts the analysis. Without a singular protagonist to carry the journey and experience the cycle of growth and rebirth, the journey becomes sloppy, and many characters do not change or change meaninglessly. If there are multiple characters who bear the role of protagonist, they need both their own set of journeys. They also need a role to play within the group that advances the journey of all and enriches the group without disrupting the story. With multiple characters experiencing conflict and growth, a dynamic can become an engine, with the internal struggle guiding the growth of all the characters shaping and sharpening the others. This internal conflict can allow a longer story to avoid the constant escalation required by only external conflicts. A good story can only thrive on external conflict for so long before it becomes a parody of itself, with every new threat making mockery of the ones preceding.

There has been work done on better defining character definition, but it lacks accessibility. These definitions require a much deeper understanding than many have, hidden in the arcana of narratology and specific literary theories. Modern character typing seems to either require a deep understanding of sociology or the regular reduction of a character to their role in the story, which, as was previously noted, often changes over time. I wanted something that was universally accessible, and applicable in a broader sense. I wanted to find a means of explaining a character's actions, motivations, and interaction that was accessible, understandable, and meaningful.

I noticed the trend in storytelling, and became obsessed. Many thesis writers will speak similarly of the focus in their work. For me, it was something that pop culture calls the four man band. The four man band is collection of allies (sometimes tenuous), united in purpose, and there are, as the name implies, always four of them. After a long period of study, I found that there were aspects in common to each of them, and titled them: the guider, the rebel, the seeker, and the celebrant.

**The guider** was the one who always need to control the situation, either by leading the group or by leaving when things didn't suit them. Often, this was caused by a trauma in their past, but also was responsible for rifts within the group as the guider would attempt to control things that didn't need them or were outside of their area of expertise. **The rebel**, ironically, behaved similarly, but was always guided by their own sense of right and wrong. This leads them into often dramatic disagreements with the guider and sometimes even with the entire group consensus. They seemed to need to be right, not allowing that others might be similarly passionate. **The seeker** was driven to seek new experiences, either through science or clumsy attempts at enlightenment. They were often studious, either studying alone or seeking to get to the bottom of things. Sometimes their pursuit of new things lead to a recklessness in that pursuit or a focus that ignored other important things. **The celebrant** held everyone together, often through humor or caregiving. The celebrant was often laid back, but most always had the good of the group in mind. The celebrant could also be overly protective, not allowing for the growth or change of the status quo, and insisting on things remaining the same in a changing world.

My understanding of these foundations started with a cartoon. The teenage mutant ninja turtles was a touchstone of my childhood, and it felt like it was everywhere. It was a cartoon, a movie, a comic book, trading cards, and video games. If there was a medium for representation, the ninja turtles were involved. There was even a concert series for a while.

Everyone identified with a certain turtle, and played that one in their friend group. It was always surprising to me how rarely people complained about their role. In other associations, there was stiff competition for the favored role. We all had the same favorite person to be in whatever role-playing we did. There were fist-fights over who was Han Solo. Same for Wolverine. But for the turtles, you picked the one most like you. There was no fight over who was who. We knew. Light bulbs lit up when I realized these were the dynamics for Scooby Doo, then Star Wars. Harry Potter was when it became more obvious, a unifier. Almost everyone, even people who didn't read or watch cartoons, knew about Harry Potter, and consumed it in some fashion. It seemed like everyone knew what a Gryffindor was. I had found my taxonomic moment.

This is where my theory came from. The theory is that all group dynamics in Western literary stories will be sortable into a single set of dynamics. I think that this will extend all the way back into the earliest stories with ensembles, even including groups like the Argonauts. I think that the divisions will come naturally, and be sortable, with little question, into the same divisions found in the Harry Potter Houses. To this end, I will define a system that someone can use (without magic) to sort literary characters into Houses. I will then take a respected and fascinating group of characters, in this case the children of King Lear, and see if they naturally fall into those four categories and work as a test case for my larger theory.

To do this, I need to define the Houses and define what clearly differentiates them. I need to use both mentions of the Houses, actions of their characters in the books, and things said by the author and others about the divisions outside the books. For a longer and more diverse analysis, I will also need a method of seeing what ensembles count as allies. I will deeply examine the characters from *King Lear*, try to understand how they work, and their guiding motivations. Once I have defined a sorting method, I will test it on characters from

the *Harry Potter* books to make sure it works, and finally, apply it to the characters and see if it works on *King Lear*.

## II. 2. My Sorting System

Since the bounds of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter are being used as our primary source for sorting, we must adhere to the sorting methods within those pages. It is fortunate that there are several books and numerous amounts of author-created content to use to establish patterns. These patterns can then be used to create a method to sort other characters that are not directly referenced by the book or the author.

Before one can establish a pattern, one must first examine the criteria for sorting. The Sorting Hat has a nifty algorithm that seems to rely on its magic and predicting the future. Even in a world in which magic is commonplace, the Sorting Hat is trusted to have powers beyond the pale. The hat must look into the mind of a child and determine what kind of a person they are going to be for the rest of their life. As a teacher, I can tell you that no child stays the same the rest of their life, or even necessarily keeps the same approach. A brave child may be injured and fearful from then on. A child who loves knowledge may discover that they love being adored more. And a child who cares for all others may eventually become selfish. The Sorting Hat has a ridiculously difficult job, and one imagines that the House one is placed in might cement the changes one is allowed to make in the future, reducing a dynamic child to a singular course of choices. That said, the magic of the hat does allow it to have some limited understanding of the driving forces that distinguish one child from another.

This magic, like most magic, does not work outside the bounds of the writer controlled world, and is therefore opaque to the audience. If the Hat says that you're a sneaky Slytherin or a huggable Hufflepuff, you are one. Given the limited dialogue presented with

Harry as he is sorted, one may presume that the wishes of the sortee are being taken into consideration, but we have no knowledge of conversations with the Hat and other students, so Harry may, as in many other cases throughout the series, be a special case. These are known Hatstalls, and are for situations in which the Hat has two primary options and must wrangle a student between them. Noted Hatstalls include Minerva McGonagall (just about the only good teacher at Hogwarts), Hermione Granger, Neville Longbottom, and Peter Pettigrew. These characters are special, in that they are complex enough to be beyond the bounds of a singular House's purview, and contain (gasp) complex character motivation beyond a singular driving goal.

A final limitation acknowledges that the books do have some bias as to who is heroic and who is villainous, lionizing certain virtues while demonizing others. For a 'proper' sorting, especially considering the amount of history that passes in the school before a certain Boy who Lived entered it, there must be an assumption of fairness and commonality in the sorting, not favoring of certain Houses, as might be done by a Headmaster. The Sorting Hat must be free of bias and its methods unimpeachable.

The first axis that must be considered is that of motivation. In a lot of ways, this might mirror several of the other methods discussed previously, but we are aiming specifically at the consideration one gives before making a decision. Does the character consider individual choice more important or do they consider communal good to be more important? Many characters believe that they know best and that any action that they choose will be for the common good. This can not be trusted. This is the reasoning of a tyrant. The best test of this is a literary situation in which the character gives up the right to make a choice because they know that they are compromised in some fashion. Acknowledgement of one's inability to value the public good is the best litmus for this particular variable, though sometimes this has not been tested by the author. Quite often, a character who regularly ignores reasonable rules,

even for ‘good reason’ prefers individual choice. Wandering around the school after hours rather than consulting an authority figure is definitely an individual choice over public good kind of decision.

The second axis we will discuss is method. Method, in this case, is divided between those who orient generally on the larger goal and those who focus on the specific tasks that advance incrementally. Literary character that have a specific idea of what they want to work toward, but not much of an idea of how to get there fall into the former category, are Goal Oriented. Characters, on the other hand, who are planners or consider long-term strategic thinking, or even who just have a method for approaching a problem would be more Task Focused.

In my examination, the Harry Potter Houses could be neatly divided between these two lines. Representing Individual Choice, we have Gryffindor and Slytherin, both known for their penchant for ignoring the rules, both tending to be headstrong and challenging to authority, and both known to believe that they are always right, often beyond the point of reason. Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff, on the other hand (though perhaps by default), are more communal, often keeping to themselves, taking care of their own, and working to promote harmony. When things are calm and placid, there is room for experimentation and growing things. Rules allow for intelligence and family to flourish, and avoids all those messy habits of individualism. Thus, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw are our representatives for Communal Good.

Similarly, both science and politics (barring some recent aberration) rely on planning and forethought. Experimentation is rarely as simple as ‘seeing what happens,’ but more often, considering things that have happened before and making educated guesses about what happens next. Politics and leadership are often about control, and unknown disruptive



elements can send a proper plan careening off the rails. Thus, Ravenclaws and Slytherin are our representatives of Task Focused. Ravenclaws and Slytherin even have this focus on detail spoken of in their virtues, with ambition and intelligence being fairly specific and measurable qualities. Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs, on the other hand, tend to have a more nebulous approach to reaching goals. Hufflepuffs idea of planning seems to be focused purely on setting the stage and letting things happen, which is necessary for growing things, but often disastrous for people. Gryffindor, with their 'fly-by-the-seat-of-their-pants' attempts at heroism and bravery are similarly unprepared for multi-step planning, generally figuring that they will succeed based on their own inherent worth or goodness. Often, these two houses have noble goals, but tend to blunder about without some sort of guidance toward these goals. Thus, Hufflepuffs and Gryffindors are our representatives of Goal Oriented, as they tend to focus on more nebulous immeasurable values like courage and kindness.

So, for the purposes of this grouping: Gryffindor are guided by Individual Choice and are Goal Oriented, Slytherin are also driven by Individual Choice, but are more Task Focused, Hufflepuff feel that Communal Good is more valued than the individual and are nebulously Goal Oriented, and finally, Ravenclaw are both guided by Communal Good and are Task Focused. It is important to mention that there is some variance as to the amount of each there might be in an individual in each House, as these are measured on a continuum, rather than a binary. One is not simply one or the other, but leans different directions and those who might be on the line (such as those who were Hat Stalls) would have their opinions rather than their motivations and methods taken into account.

It must also be mentioned that the Motivations and Methods one uses do not mean that one is particularly skilled at that House's virtues. Just because one is driven by Individual Choice and is Task Oriented (a Slytherin) doesn't mean that one will be a good leader or particularly pure. Just because one is Goal Oriented and Individually Focused (Gryffindor)

doesn't mean that one is always particularly courageous. There are people who are bad at being in their Houses. Crabbe and Goyle were not particularly ambitious or successful at leadership, but they were model Slytherin. The same follows in reverse, as one does not have to be Gryffindor to be heroic. Despite being friendly and kind, Cedric Diggory comports himself heroically, even sacrificing his life, though still a model Hufflepuff.

### III. HP Characters and Houses

Like many modern literary creations, there is a naked appeal to tribalism in the Harry Potter books, as we all want to identify with, and be identified with something. We all need recognition and representation. So many people took social media quizzes that it has become a trope. These quizzes were often taken to tell the person taking them which Friend (from *Friends*) they were or whether they were a Charlotte or Samantha (from *Sex in the City*) or even which Ninja Turtle they most resembled. Similarly, fans and people who read *Harry Potter* showed allegiance to their Houses. Like much of modern literature, this is childhood writ large, with adults finally allowed to continue their beloved childhood pursuits well into adulthood. Gone are the times when adults must "put away childish things" and adults are now able to support the "childish things" that they love financially with the purchase of toys, apparel, and miscellaneous merchandise.

The mythology of the Houses probably started small and was expanded over the course of the series to be a little less "This one is the good house, that one is the bad house." This expansion was done with the expansion of our understanding of the House and School Founders and their personalities, traits and flaws. Just like the color of a cowboy's hat in a Western (white hat for good guy, black for bad, a classic literary shorthand), the House system was an easy way to distinguish an otherwise faceless student that hadn't been in the story moments before. A random Hufflepuff was likely to be helpful or innocent, while a

random Slytherin was supposed to gum up the works or be a bigot. This is a regular trope in fantasy both old and new as you would have characters of certain fantasy races that allowed one to know a great deal about their characters with cultural shorthand. Faeries, depending on where one was, were unknowingly distant but magically proficient, helpful in the right circumstances, dangerous if underestimated. Elves were noble and beautiful and long lived, dwarves avaricious and talented at creation. None of these were invented by modern fantasy, but they were often used a sort of shorthand. You could know a lot about a character with very little description.

The Houses could also add a bit of urgency to unimportant things, especially in the earlier Harry Potter novels. When children are told that they will lose points for their Houses, they are made to care about things that other child heroes would scoff at. Most child heroes of literature ignore the rules a bit, but adding consequences allowed the heroic young Gryffindors an extra little bit of heft to their risks and courageousness. Hermione and Ron specifically faced their greatest fears pretty seriously in those first books, preparing them for even greater sacrifice later. Similarly, the sports allowed for arbitrary affiliations that many teens (and not a few adults) consider sacrosanct. Loyalty to one's team, whether American football, soccer, baseball, or hockey, can often cause people to do and say things far out of their character. As I mentioned before, this raising of the stakes for the first few books allows an illusion of danger where there is none, so that the genuine dangers can be downplayed in the interest of whimsy, and so as not to settle the primary conflicts so quickly there was no buildup of the villain.

Especially at the beginning of the books, there is a certain clear demonstration of which House one should support and which one should despise. The heel/face dynamic is almost cartoonish, with the author almost personally directing you as to who you should cheer and boo. This is made even more true when the three main characters are more akin to

a House other than Gryffindor, throwing the entire question of the Houses into more stark relief. As I mentioned earlier in the thesis, regular people can not be classified by their primary motivations or characteristics. We are too complicated and dynamic. The fact that our three primary examples of Gryffindor are so much like the other Houses can be a little off-putting if one is of an analytical bent. Heroes are always exceptional examples of the affiliations they come from, but it seemed as if Hermione was destined for Ravenclaw and Ron for Hufflepuff, while Harry seemed doomed to Slytherin. The implications were just too stark for that to have been accidental.

The best and least biased definitions of the Houses come from the Sorting Hat, which gets more elaborate in its description as time goes on. The first sorting song gives each House between 2 and 4 adjectives to define it. It's okay, though, because there's plenty of background chatter to explain who the reader should appreciate and who shouldn't be trusted. Over time, these explanations are deepened, and characters and backstories fill in the holes and challenge some of the prejudices held by the main characters and those nearby. Over time, one can even appreciate the villains of the stories, although maybe not forgiving them for everything bad that they did (as Harry seemed to). Still, the growth of the characters maturity and the growth of the body of the work made the black and white extend into quite a few shades of gray. While some of those shades were considerably darker than others, the fact that there was gray at all leads to some thoughtful musing by readers of the books after the fact.

### III. 1. Gryffindor

Gryffindor looms large over all the other Houses in the Harry Potter books. They are the House of the protagonists, who are therefore destined for greatness. Gryffindor is the House that values heroism and courage above all, and the House that we are all supposed to

root for. It seems pretty straightforward at its base. A House that harbors all the heroes of the series, what more could one want. It is only in later books, or in a discerning reader, that one might begin to question whether this is a reliable description that can be trusted. The word Gryffindor appears a whopping 687 times in the 7 books, and while a significant number of these mentions are descriptive (the Gryffindor table, the Gryffindor common room, the Gryffindor quidditch team, etc), it is still almost as many times as the other Houses combined (808 mentions) (Rowling). Our best methods for understanding the House, aside from it being central to the story, are the songs of the Sorting Hat.

The initial sorting hat song doesn't tell us much about the Gryffindor. In that first book, the Hat describes the House as where dwell "the brave of heart," and where "their daring, nerve, and chivalry" set them apart (*TPS* 93). Fortunately the hat grows more verbose in future books. In *Goblet of Fire*, it gives us a bit of expository history on the Founders themselves. Unfortunately, despite readers learning the fact that Gryffindor created the Sorting Hat, it really only told us that Gryffindor prized "the bravest" (*GoF* 114). Even *Order of the Phoenix*, the final sorting song, doesn't give us much more, though we do receive much more history of the Founders. In this one, Gryffindor promises to teach those "with great deeds to their name," though as most of the students being sorted are young children, the ferocity of those great deeds is somewhat suspect (*OotP* 205). Instead, one might suspect that those whose parents had great deeds or people from whom great things are expected. Despite this dearth of definition, these are the most explicit descriptors of the individual Houses and must define them for the reader.

According to secondary sources, such as interviews, J.K Rowling's official Harry Potter Website Pottermore, and the Harry Potter wiki, students of House Gryffindor possess the virtues of Bravery, Nerve, Athleticism, Courage, Chivalry, and Daring. Tragically, most of these are synonyms for bravery. Bravery, nerve, courage, and daring all mean a very

similar thing, and are hard to define in an individual beyond a willingness to stand up for what one believes is right and not being a coward. This fearlessness in the books can occasionally manifest as stupidity, with the brave individual in question standing up to insane odds rather than going elsewhere, making a plan, and returning to the fight. It can also result in a large number of people around said hero being put into danger for the hero's sake, because the hero refused to not be brave for a few minutes. This seems a common enough Gryffindor trait, as it manifests in multiple characters of the House. Perhaps Rowling's own words say it best, in *Harry Potter, Beyond the Page*, when she says, "Now, the Gryffindors comprise a lot of foolhardy and show-offy people, that's just the way it is, I'm a Gryffindor, I'm allowed to say it. You know, there's bravery, and there's also showboating, and sometimes the two go together." This acknowledgement of her allegiance also does call her objectivity into question a bit as well. Finally, athleticism is not particularly a mental virtue, though it can suggest a willingness to commit to a consistent set of goals, especially when working toward a clear end point. Similarly, chivalry does imply a dedication to others, although several of the characters of Gryffindor seem to have an issue with this particular virtue as well. It is hard to coalesce these nebulous traits into a whole separate from others.

Fortunately, there are multitudinous examples of characters who exemplify and define the boundaries of the House, and Gryffindor, as the central and House of the protagonists, has more than others. The title character of the series is definitely brave, facing death and injury regularly, and never shying from placing himself in danger, much to the chagrin of those trying in vain to protect him. In fact, Harry seems to challenge any attempt to limit him at all, insisting that he knows better than pretty much all the adults and protectors who enter his life. Even if he loves them, as in the case of Hagrid, Dumbledore, and Sirius (all also Gryffindors), he can not seem to trust that they might know more than him or what is good for him. This willfulness seems to embody the House of Gryffindor almost as much as

courage does, as we see ample examples of Gryffindors refusing to counsel with others and insisting upon their own way. This willfulness also gives lie a bit to the idea that Gryffindors are chivalrous. Ron is regularly more than awkward and often downright mean to the women in his life, hurting their feelings and having to be harangued into not bullying them. Finally, chivalry is considered a form of fairness, a set of rules of engagement, and Gryffindors are often quick to call Slytherins cheaters, but Gryffindors do not shy from taking advantage of some pretty unfair situations. Harry uses gifts from others regularly to get ahead, whether in the form of his first broom, the Invisibility Cloak, the Marauder's Map, or even the potions book of the Half-Blood Prince. He does not hesitate to use these things that definitely give him unfair advantages. Similarly, Dumbledore often gave points to specifically allow his own House to win the House Cup. Even the House Founder was not above playing a little unfairly, if any of the stories of him cheating the goblins about the Sword of Gryffindor are true, which certainly seems implied.

Gryffindors do get a bit more reserved as they get older, though their plans are still rudimentary at best and rely on a great deal of trust on all involved. Betrayal is the kryptonite of Gryffindor plans, with even a single piece being out of place causing the whole plan to fall to shambles. This happens in the death of Harry's parents as well as in Mundungus's failure to support Moody in the *Deathly Hallows* (78). A singular trusted player out of place leads to the death of a character. They also, with a few rare exceptions, do not think more than a few steps ahead, often trusting to their abilities and courage to save them from dangerous situations. Even those with some strategic chops tend to ill inform those around them as to the plan, leaving many simply trying to keep up or being in the wrong place as needed. It could be argued that another virtue that Gryffindors tend to rely on is pure dumb luck. Often, a hapless Gryffindor will fall into a fortunate situation and somehow manage to

succeed despite all odds. If that doesn't work, then maybe the Headmaster will give them just enough points to win the House Cup whether they deserve it or not.

Gryffindors prize bravery and self-guidance. They tend to defy authority, often rightly, but will almost always trust themselves to know better than anyone else. They tend to look to long-term goals rather than short term tasks, and rarely have back-up plans beyond the most basic of contingencies. They are not afraid to use unfair advantages, but consider others doing so to be 'cheating,' which they consider to be a dire offense. Gryffindors are the House of the protagonists, and are easy to root for, especially if you are young and don't know that many Gryffindors yourself.

### III. 2. Slytherin

Slytherin are the straw men against which the protagonists test their mettle in the Harry Potter books. Initially used as foils and antagonists, they graduate to being the primary evils of Hogwarts and the Second Wizarding War, as apparently all Death Eaters are drawn from the ranks of Slytherin (except for that one Gryffindor). They are the House that values ambition, and somehow purity at the same time, even though the two are often at odds. As Hagrid tells Harry (somewhat erroneously) in the first book, that there's "not a single witch or wizard that went bad that wasn't in Slytherin" (*TPS* 62). Slytherin, in their role as the primary antagonists for the school portion of the books, are mentioned only slightly less than Gryffindor, and more than the other two Houses together (477 to 331) (Rowling). Again, perhaps the least biased measure of the reasons for sorting come from the Sorting Hat and its songs.

The first sorting song gives us very little information about the House of Slytherin, allowing for only the two descriptors, as "the cunning folk" who use "any means to achieve their ends" (*TPS* 94). Perhaps it's a little better to describe them as "having great ambition"



rather than simply being willing to do anything to get their way. Similarly, while all the founders received a complimentary adjective in the early part of the song (bold, fair, sweet, shrewd), only Slytherin receives a personal dig for choosing ambitious people, because he's "power-hungry" (*TGoF* 114). The final sorting song lets us know that the founders and namesakes of Gryffindor and Slytherin were amazing friends, but that they had a falling out. It also no longer mentions ambition or tenacity, but only purity and then cunning (*TOotP* 204-205). The sorting songs, despite being the most explicit reference to how these literary characters are sorted, are relatively light on the details of the sorting.

Trusting to secondary sources, such as interviews, J.K Rowling's official Harry Potter Website Pottermore, and the Harry Potter wiki, students of House Slytherin possess the virtues of Resourcefulness, Cunning, Ambition, Determination, Leadership, Self-Preservation, Fraternity, and Cleverness. Resourcefulness, cunning, and cleverness are all fairly similar things, though the first two often have a slippery sort of insult bound into the description, implying, rather than intelligence, a sort of base and unintentional ability to achieve or acquire things. Similarly, self-preservation is code in many books of this kind as cowardice, with a sort of attempt to imply that tactical retreat is a reasoning for lacking courage. Finally, fraternity, in the case of the Harry Potter books, is more of a cliquish nature, wherein the Slytherin who keep to themselves have no one to stand up for them when they are banished en masse from the final battle in the seventh book (*TDH*). They are dreadfully lacking in representing leadership in the Harry Potter books, only managing to lead each other, and even then in a thuggish manner. All that's really left is the one trait that is demonized more than any other in heroic books: ambition. As they are, at least in the times of a certain boy wizard, terrible at leadership, the desire to lead and be in charge seems most strange. Generally, one does not select a group of people based on their tendency to fail at what you select them for. Rather, it is the failure of leadership that has led them astray. This

leaves us with an uncomfortable trait not mentioned because it has happier connotations with the Hufflepuffs to be mentioned in the next section. This trait is loyalty, and it is ruined by Voldemort and his rise to power. His exploitation of this misplaced loyalty both before the books and during them is what makes Slytherin so worthless in the Harry Potter books. Most of their virtues simply aren't represented in the Harry Potter books, even by the few Slytherin who are not empty straw men.

To explore this further, let us examine the representative characters of House Slytherin. Crabbe and Goyle are just about useless, but they are certain loyal. They never leave Draco's side unless it is to preserve themselves or to seek help. It is doubtful that they even understand many of the quips he makes, but they always dutifully laugh at them. Draco, himself is loyal to his family and the idea of family. It seems to be the driving force for him, as he is risking life and limb regularly just to impress his father and to improve the family name (or at least keep from besmirching it). He puts a brave face on the many times he doesn't wish to do something, but regularly the readers are shown his desperation to belong being strangled by the promises he's made and his loyalty to his family and his House. Certainly, ambition has something to do with his actions, but he is never willing to sacrifice those he is loyal to. He is given ample opportunity to come over to the 'good' side, if he'll only betray a few of the bad people that have had his back in the past. Professor Slughorn is another example of loyalty in the face of extreme measures. Dumbledore used Harry's celebrity to entice him back to Hogwarts and manipulate him into teaching there. However, once there, he was a staunch champion of the school and involved in the defense of it. While functionally a coward, he nonetheless demonstrated loyalty more than once, to the school, Dumbledore, and members of his Slug Club. Finally, looking at loyalty past the point of reason, there is Severus Snape. His loyalty was to the woman he loved, long after she was married, had a child by another, and died. That is not healthy, but it is loyal. He continued to

love her long past any sense of reason. He despised Harry's father, but owed her memory his loyalty, and it affected his Patronus charm, the "projection of all your most positive feelings" making her patronus his (*PoA*). He also had loyalty to Malfoy's mother, protecting him from the odious task that the Dark Lord laid upon him. Finally, it was his loyalty to Dumbledore and the school that required him to be the one to kill him. Snape was seemingly solely guided by his obligations to others, seeming lost when not directly following the threads of those obligations. This is a common enough thread to suggest that it is representative of the House.

Slytherin are similar to Gryffindor in their defiance of other people's orders and expectations. There are several instances of them trying to cheat in Quidditch throughout the series, everything from the fake Dementors to the uses of excessive force in play. Snape regularly punishes those that he doesn't care for with loss of House points, unfairly taking more points based on his personal opinion. Slytherin generally listen only to their own, and sporadically at that. Because of this, they too are defined by listening to their own inner voice rather than the guidance of those outside of themselves. Unlike Gryffindor, however, they often have complex schemes with long-term contingencies. Rather than the haphazard plans of the Gryffindor, which are short and simple, Slytherin plans are complex and long-term, demonstrated by Voldemort's plans on Harry Potter (and others) The creation of horcruxes required a great deal of forethought and planning, as well as multi-step preparation. Also, the use of Draco to kill Dumbledore, which was the work of more than a year. Even that plan had the contingency of having Snape prepared to do it if Malfoy failed. Barty Crouch Junior's work in Goblet of Fire required a great deal of foreplanning and arranging, kidnapping Moody, and applying a ridiculous amount of convoluted foreknowledge to allow Harry both to enter the Tri-Wizard Tournament and to keep him in it . All of Voldemort's attempts to return, his regular laying of traps (see the Chamber of Secrets, Tom Riddle's Diary, the aforementioned Goblet of Fire, his plans to kill Dumbledore, the kidnapping of Luna, etc.),

his foreplanning defined what it meant to be a Slytherin in the limited scope of the books. Even the Founder, who created the Chamber of Secrets initially, was clearly planning for a future beyond his own usage. This seeming ability to plan for unforeseen events allows Slytherins to have always seemed one step ahead of our protagonists, with often only dumb luck and blind heroism allowing the heroes to succeed.

### III. 3. Ravenclaw

Now we get to what really feel like the placeholder Houses, at least in the earlier books. Ravenclaw is the House that generally stays out of the way of all the ridiculous shenanigans of Gryffindor and the scheming of Slytherin. Presumably, this is because they are intelligent and drama gets in the way of experimentation and success. If the story needs someone smart or studious who is not Hermione, it will be a Ravenclaw. Does your protagonist need a short fling with someone who can threaten him athletically, but is really too self-aware for his deep denial? This will also be a Ravenclaw. Somehow, Ravenclaw never wins the House cup in the books, perhaps because of the focus on the continuing Slytherin / Gryffindor dichotomy. Somehow, the main story about them ends up being how damaged the daughter of the founder is. This, if nothing else, tells us that the writer of the books might be just a bit biased.

The Sorting Hat is pretty straightforward about Ravenclaw, and almost as consistent as Gryffindor. It is hard to know if this is because of their settled nature or because they simply weren't that important to the story. In the first book's sorting song, they get a great many adjectives, even if a few appear incidental. "Wise" and "old" imply a little bit of the boring that the first book maybe wanted to convey, while "ready mind" appears to suggest that the willingness to learn might be more important than necessarily an actual intelligence, and "where those of wit and learning will always find their kind" solidifies the image of

Ravenclaw as helpful foils and the occasional love interest (*TPS* 94). This is perhaps the best initial description of any of the Houses, being both broad and deep in its offering, and giving us two characters (discussed later) who will define the limits of the House. *Goblet of Fire* gives us little more, simply saying that to the founder of Ravenclaw, “the cleverest would always be the best”(114). Clever is a slippery word and has multiple meanings based on its usage, so this doesn’t help us too much. In the UK, the source of the author, clever is generally a positive thing, but always seems to have the baggage of implication of people, especially children being ‘a little too clever’. The final song has a different flavor, as Ravenclaw then says that she’ll teach those whose “intelligence is surest,” which adds a bit of a gradient, not necessarily making all those Ravenclaw the smartest, but those whose intelligence is surest and most reliable, though it later says that “only those of the sharpest mind” were taught by Ravenclaw (*OotP* 205). Again, both of these imply more of an approach than a collection of knowledge.

According to secondary sources, though attributed to the author, Ravenclaw virtues include: Intelligence, Wit, Wisdom, Creativity, Originality, Individuality, Sharpness, and Acceptance. Again, we seem to have a confluence of similar words, with mild variation. Intelligence, wit, and sharpness are, for all intents and purposes, the same when it comes to the generalities we heap upon the placeholder Houses. There are less than half a dozen Ravenclaws that are meaningful for more than a single book, and their lack of development shows in this instance. Wisdom, while not the same as intelligence, is also a slippery term, especially given the examples we will look at in the next paragraph. Creativity and originality are aspects of individuality, which, at least, are definitely represented in our model Ravenclaws. This House is meant to be the brain trust of Hogwarts, tested regularly and sharply, not even allowed to enter their sleeping dormitory without answering a new riddle

every time. Intelligence is hard to measure, especially among those who regularly use magic rather than reason to accomplish things.

The easiest and most often mentioned example of the House of Ravenclaw is a pariah amongst her own House members, Luna Lovegood. She has the individuality, creativity, and originality in spades, so much that multiple people refer to her as Loony throughout the series. Her quirkiness does not hide her intelligence, and her often bizarre way of looking at the world proves invaluable to Harry and his friends in their quest. Despite her regularly being right, she definitely tries the final listed virtue of acceptance, as the Ravenclaw fail to accept her, stealing her things and hiding them. This bullying decries the acceptance of the house and makes a bit of a mockery of it. Cho Chang is a rather flavorless sort of Ravenclaw, good at sports and less so at certain charms as a member of Dumbledore's Army. She was more of an object of the story than having any sort of agency herself. Much more interesting are the Ravenclaw teachers. Filius Flitwick makes regular appearances and is known for his staunch love of the school and his competence as a teacher (something few at Hogwarts seem to manage). Sybil Trelawney is a much more like Luna Lovegood's kind of Ravenclaw. She is possessed of a serious case of individuality and community, but also an uncommon knack for being right in a twisted sort of way. Despite many of her prophecies being wrong at first glance and on the surface, there was always a different way to read them later, in which they were always true. This may say more about the opaque nature of divination than any incompetence on her part. There was a similarity of surface incompetence with another Ravenclaw teacher Gilderoy Lockhart, who despite having very little talent, convinced many that others' exploits were his own (*CoS*). He was famous for committing multiple powerful magics and defeating several monsters heroically, but we find out that he accomplished none of the legendary feats, but was accomplished at memory charms, which allowed him to take the credit for any number of heroic individuals. Shady, yes, but he did manage to successfully

defeat, after a fashion, many clearly heroic wizards. All of these are examples show not exactly a common intelligence, but a knack for seeing the world differently, for succeeding in an unexpected way, and in being successful by one's own standards.

Using the similarities and differences already established by our other, more present Houses, one might say that Ravenclaws are considerably more likely to respect authority and abide by rules that are made clear to them. Ravenclaw like rules, because they are then allowed to experiment more freely within them, and a structured and sustained environment allows for a more specific set of criteria to be tested. Fewer variables means cleaner results. Ravenclaws are not directly focused, or sometimes even aware, of long-term goals, often focused singularly on the tasks in front of them. They sometimes do not make assumptions on where their experiments are taking them, preferring to find out when they get there. Ravenclaws are generally thoughtful and intelligent, but like most geniuses, are hard to understand if you yourself are not a genius. Genius, of course, is not a measure of worth, and doesn't make one a good person. It merely indicates achievement and pursuit of accumulation of knowledge.

### III. 4. Hufflepuff

Finally, the least mentioned House in the books is Hufflepuff, the kind and friendly House. Apparently, the Hufflepuff are a decent, innocent, normal group of people who just happen to be Wizards. They are often used as the hapless people caught up in the schemes of the Slytherin or the heroics of the Gryffindor. If a protagonist goes too far, it's often a nameless (up to that point) Hufflepuff who calls them out or is afraid of their new reputation. Even kind old Hagrid says "everyone says Hufflepuff are a lot of duffers," which means an incompetent or stupid person (*TPS 62*). We'll talk about why this is a deep irony below. Hufflepuff has a reputation of being where you go if you're not particularly brave, ambitious,

or clever, and it is possible that that is where they started, but their later development, while not amazing, does make the House a bit deeper, and allows for Hufflepuff heroes.

The Sorting Songs give us a better picture of the Hufflepuff than do the rare notable Hufflepuff characters. The first song explains that they are “just and loyal,” while also saying that they are “patient,” “true,” and “unafraid of toil” (94). These are also a great deal more sketching out than the Houses mentioned more than them have received. Gryffindor and Slytherin have significantly less descriptive development in their songs, especially initially. The problem with unafraid of toil is that it implies that everything special about them comes from work and not from talent, implying that the other Houses are more naturally talented than them. If the world of wizards, where the only thing separating wizards from non-wizards is talent, this implication is pretty stark. The second song only mentions that they are “hard workers,” again implying that there is little special about them. The final Sorting Song is not kind to Hufflepuff, implying as they are mentioned last and “took the rest”, that they are least (*OotP* 205). Also, many of the descriptors imply that they just take anyone that doesn’t fit elsewhere. This is often scoffed about by the more elitist Houses, but actually implies a greater strength.

The Hufflepuff virtues are known, from the books and secondary sources, to be Dedication, Hardworking, Fairness, Patience, Kindness, Tolerance, Modesty, and Loyalty. Most of these are virtues that don’t regularly make it into protagonists of heroic fiction or children’s fiction. Instead, they are good supporting character virtues. They are also good virtues for real people, as we’ll mention in two paragraphs. Dedicated, hard working, and patient are generally tied to steady people, salt of the earth people who support our heroes, which makes it a bit ironic that they weren’t terribly supportive of the Boy Who Lived. Perhaps if he and the headmaster who knew what was going on had been more forthcoming, they would have had more of the support of the House. They are also fair, kind, tolerant, and



loyal. It feels like these should be protagonist qualities, but they rarely are, as it is more expedient to have a rude, thoughtless child blundering their way through the story, only learning these virtues when it's far too late for any of them to be of value, and the author doesn't have to demonstrate them because the story is over. The problem really is that most of the descriptors for Hufflepuff are passive, and require a long time with a character to be seen as more than cosmetic. This is compounded by the fact that the audience never really spends much time with any Hufflepuffs in the original seven book run. As a result, Hufflepuff is a bit of a placeholder, at least in the original books, although the most recent movies have placed Hufflepuff front and center, with a Hufflepuff protagonist.

Hufflepuffs get the least love when it comes to coverage or notable characters in the books. Despite the Mary Sue nature of Cedric Diggory, he is one of the few that we get to see up close. He is kind, brave, and self-sacrificing, but that is mostly because the story requires him to be. He has as little agency as his girlfriend (until he dies) Cho Chang. The only other important Hufflepuff in the books is Nymphadora Tonks, who has an interesting personal relationship, but is tragically surrounded by Gryffindors in the Order of the Phoenix and does little to differentiate herself from them. Her steadfast loyalty and willingness to support her friends with patience and stubbornness generally happens off-screen, with the audience only seeing the barest examples of it during the books and movies. Probably the best example of a Hufflepuff is Newt Scamander, star of the recent *Fantastic Beast* movies and who demonstrates all of the above qualities with verve and distinction without diminishing the heroic nature of the plots that include him. Given time, all of these virtues are confirmed to be dramatically heroic, but sadly, the Hufflepuff got no such diligence and their virtues and character were not showcased in the original books or films.

We know from secondary sources that Hufflepuff has produced the fewest Dark Wizards of any of the Houses. We also know, from *Harry Potter, Beyond the Page*, that they

are Rowling's favorite House, and her daughter (who is not a Hufflepuff) is quoted as saying that "we should all want to be Hufflepuffs." She also describes the worthiness of Hufflepuffs during the final Battle of Hogwarts, remarking that all the Hufflepuffs stay, not for grand or dramatic reasons, like many of the Gryffindor, but because it's the right thing to do. The Hufflepuffs are more likely to respect rules and authority, being willing to accept some personal discomfort to allow for the greater benefit of the common good. This aligns them with Ravenclaws and sets them opposite of Gryffindor and Slytherin. They are also less likely to plan ahead, specifically, often finding such joy in individual tasks that they don't tend to think specifically about what's coming next. They are, however, quite likely to have a long term goal in mind that they might be working toward, but their devotion to it is stubborn but non-specific. The Hufflepuffs don't seem to much care how they get to their long-term goal, as long as they are making progress toward it.

#### IV. Hypothesis

According to my analysis of the Houses, the first axis that defines the sorting is whether a character follows more the dictates of personal choice or is willing to sacrifice autonomy and sometimes agency for the common good. Slytherin and Gryffindor are more likely to prefer the dictates of their own inner voices (personal choice) over the communally decided rules that social contracts present. Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw, for differing reasons, prefer that everyone follows the rules determined to be good for all (communal good), often willing to accept a little personal discomfort for the good of others, rather than choosing to break rules according to their own whims. The second axis along which sorting occurs is that of planning. Slytherin and Ravenclaw are often focused on the specific steps to take to achieve a goal, sometimes getting so wrapped up in what's next that they forget where they are going. The process and multiple contingencies define their interests in planning. Gryffindor and Hufflepuff are more likely to think about the end point than the specifics to

arrive there. They will often meander a bit on the way there, but always trust in their long-term success. Gryffindors, therefore, prefer personal choice and are goal oriented. Slytherin also prefer personal choice, but are more task-focused. Ravenclaws believe that the common good is generally more important than personal choice, and tend to focus on specifics and the next step. Finally, Hufflepuffs tend to find common good more important than personal choice, and focus on long-term goals rather than the specific steps to take to get to them.

Using these criteria, I will be examining King Lear's children, to attempt to put them into a House that best represents their words and actions in the play, as well as their relationships to other characters. I believe that, like many other groupings, they will divide naturally into the four Houses, representing the dynamic of the Band of Four.

#### IV. 1. King Lear Characters

To properly discuss and classify the characters from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, there must be some distinctions made. First, for the purposes of this work, we ignore Gloucester and his get, as they are incidental to the dynamics of the family of Lear. Edmund will come up in defining the elder sisters, but is not one of our sorted, and is thus, unimportant. Second, the internal hierarchy of the children must be discussed. When describing King Lear's children, I must include the Fool, as he is as much a child of Lear as his natural born children. He is never treated as a servant, and gets away with a great deal more than the natural children do. Moreover, he never, despite the King's increasing madness and abuse, abandons the King. Also, it must be acknowledged and discussed what an abusive nightmare Lear actually was, and how the family must have looked before the play to understand the actions and motivations of those characters during the course of the play.

The fact that none of his children remarked upon his horrific 'Who loves me most?' game, but just went along with it implies that this sort of thing was a normal thing for him.

They knew their roles within Lear's tirades, and played them. Lear was often confused by the actions of those around him, even though they were indicative of a pattern that clearly had played itself out recently, and likely repeatedly. Surely, Cordelia had defied him before this moment, and yet somehow remained a favored child. Why is it that when he advised one of his daughters about the rotting of her womanly parts, he was surprised she was hurt by this? This was not the first instance of abuse in this household. No, Lear was a serial abuser, and just like the patriarch who swears that, this time, not like the last several dozen, this time, he will change and be better, Lear's abuses did not begin with the play and audience watching, but represent a pattern of abuse.

King Lear's children were none of them what their time period would want as children, especially the children of nobility. They had few of the virtues that the time valued, as they were not possessed of obedience, submission, or the seeking of children. All four defied their father in some fashion, either verbally or physically. Their reasons may have varied in their nature and intention, but all defied him, whether for his own good or ill. All of the children had some fault in the tragedy, but they also all had common cause, and presumably did not wish, at the start, for all those in their family to die. Indeed, in many productions of the play, all of the children show remorse and sadness and empathy for their family, if not the common folk. The characters are fairly complicated, when examined closely, and are a good deal more conflicted than they seem.

The Fool is defined by his ability both to defy and to comfort, to be wise and to be foolish. Indeed, he is a study in contrasts. This is true no matter whether you ascribe him to die (as many productions make clear) or to simply be done with all of this and exiting the play. Up to this point, he is a foil for the King, challenging his assertions and reminding him of his failures. His acid never seems to be entirely destructive though, always counseling the king to fix things and to care for himself, long after most of those who were supposed to have

abandoned him. He disappears in Act 3, Scene 6 after the mock trial, with his last line being “and I’ll go to bed at noon,” in response to Lear’s mad “we’ll go to supper in the morning,” and many theorize that he kills himself (*King Lear* 3.6). Some productions have him murdered and some simply have him hang himself in relation to King Lear’s words in Act 5, Scene 3, “And my poor fool is hanged.” (*KL* 5.3.369). He acts in direct defiance of even his King, though, despite repeated threats against his person. He attempts to work for the good of all, but especially those he cares for. The rule of law protects him, but he doesn’t seem to respect it, often challenging the keepers of that law.

Cordelia, in many ways the hero of the story, despite her disappearance and off-screen death, is defined by her unfortunate inability to lie, even at the cost of her father’s love. She refuses to indulge in the flattery of her sisters, because she feels like it is wrong. Moreover, she feels like it will be more wrong in the long-term to lie than to engage in flattery for short-term gain. The youngest daughter, she has been subjected to her father the least, and while his immediate dismissal of her for such a minor infraction seems extreme, at least she is spared the venom he directs at his eldest daughter Goneril. While she seems to be charming for her two suitors, at least one of them cares for her more than the alliance and the money she is worth, and France is willing to marry her without dowry and including the enmity of her father. Finally, she seems fairly competent, landing soldiers at Dover and being prepared to take back her patrimony by force with France. Despite her failure, she aims to regain her father and his lands, once the perfidy of her sisters is established.

The real difficulty for many is separating the villains of this work. Goneril and Regan are interchangeable for many in their villainy, but they are distinct and different when looked at closely enough. They both pursued the treacherous bastard, Edmund, and offered themselves to him, though seemingly for different reasons. They both were willing to lie to their father, for the sake of inheritance and material gain. They both were violent in defense

of what they believed to be theirs, and both were cruel and unwomanly by the standards of the time. Saleh, in her work *Female Iconography in King Lear*, puts it more succinctly, noting that they were “defined as humanly imperfect, unconventional, strong, sexually vital, risk-taking, and rebellious,” in defiance of the standards not just of the mores of that time period, but of the depiction of women then (Beyad 150). These two women were voracious in their appetites, whether for power or a man. They were willing to do horrible things, but they were definitely not the same person.

Goneril was the more effectively murderous. She killed her sister. She seemed to do it more for expediency than for joy. She is calculatingly murderous, using poison and, when the worst of her crimes was committed, killing herself. She invites Edward to kill her husband rather than getting her own hands dirty. Given what we can extemporize about the acts of her father, she starts out eminently reasonable. He is loudly partying at her house, he has abused one of her servants for chiding the Fool. He has no real standing other than her much lauded ‘love’ for him and previous rulership. She owes him care, and nothing more. If his words are any indication, she has been abused by him for her entire life. As the eldest child, she has spent the most time with him, and he is not delicate with her feelings in the least. While he may use endearments on the other children, he heaps specific and horrific curses upon her for daring to chide his Fool and to ask him to keep his revelry down. In her house, challenging her power, her father threatens and insults. When her husband challenges her, she attempts to get Edmund to kill him. She uses him as a tool, and while she may enjoy it, his primary purpose to her seems to be freeing her from the limitation of her husband, who wishes to act honorably and has become a liability to her. She sets things into motion and does what she feels needs must be done to get what she wants.

Regan, on the other hand, seems to enjoy her bloodthirsty nature, torturing Gloucester. She told him that his son had betrayed him, just to twist the knife. She extended

the punishment of Kent, seemingly taking joy in his pain as well. She also makes Gloucester's punishment worse, though it doesn't seem planned. But there is another side to Regan. While Lear might call her sister all sorts of names, he refuses to curse Regan, praising her "tender-hefted nature," and claiming that her eyes are a "comfort" (*KL* 2.1). After arguing with him near the castle of Gloucester, she offers to take him in, but not the unruly knights of his train. When he has run off, she counsels the local castle to be away from thee doors for their safety. While many see this as merely calculation, it need not be, as Goneril said nothing of the sort. Finally, she seems to care for her husband, hurt and sad when he is damaged (admittedly in the bloodthirsty torture of another), but she only offers herself to Edmund after her husband is gone and she is alone.

The characters are fairly well defined despite the shortness of the work, and allow for an understanding of their base pursuits motivations. The Fool wishes to council, to care for those he cares about, but is fearless and willing to challenge any authority. He does what he believes is right, no matter the cost. Cordelia pursues the truth with doggedness, unwilling to put aside her belief in the common good and decency for short-term gain or personal reward. Indeed, she seems not to care for wealth and physical things as much as others. Goneril is an ambitious

#### IV. 2. King Lear Sorted

The point of this thesis was to see if an older literary work with multiple characters would sort out into the four Harry Potter Houses. This is part of a long term goal to establish if there is a trend to have similar character types for ensembles throughout literary history. The test case for this is seeing if the four children of King Lear would be sorted into the Hogwarts' Houses. It must be noted that just because the characters might have been sorted into a House doesn't mean that they are good at the Virtues of that House, nor that they

would be notable members of the House. Even exceptional people can fade into the background, to be plucked from obscurity when the author needs them. We heard no mention of Cedric for the first books, nor Luna. The question is not whether the characters from Lear would be famous members of their Houses, paragons of their virtues, but whether they would adequately and well represent those Houses.

The Fool is a Gryffindor. He is fearless to the point of foolhardiness, regularly challenging the nobles and knights, and often requiring the King to save him from the consequences of his actions. Despite this, he even defies his King when he feels that his King has done wrong. He questions and challenges, but doesn't seem to have a great deal of planning involved, often requiring outside aid to answer the questions his mouth poses. He doesn't seem to think beyond whether a statement is funny or not, and while he has a gift for wit, we see very little forethought that might suggest that he is a Ravenclaw. He trusts only his own autonomy, regularly ignores authority, even when that authority is what shields him from the dangers of the world. He doesn't seem to have long-term plans, and his goal to keep the King safe and happy is short-term, at best. He may be seen to question some long-term decisions, but defaults to the planning of others. I have defined him as valuing Individual Choice and Goal Oriented, making him a Gryffindor.

Goneril is a Slytherin. She is ambitious and scheming from the very beginning. She believes that she knows better than anyone, including her father, the King, and her husband, the Duke of Albany. She manipulates Edmund and others, using letters and deceit to propagate her schemes, and thinking two steps ahead of most of the others in the play. She sets up her sister, and even uses poison, a favored weapon of the Slytherins of the world. Because of this, she is defined as Individual Choice and Task Focused, making her a Slytherin.



Cordelia is a Ravenclaw. She is intelligent and shrewd, picking apart her father's argument with logic and verve. With her absence, she also emulates the Ravenclaw, as most of her influence is when she is not there. She is someone for her father to pine over, and her absence is a point of the plot, but when she is present, she is competent and sure. She presumably partners with her husband to sail for Dover when she hears of her sisters' treachery. With the little we see of her, she seems bound to the truth and is willing to sacrifice her dowry for her dedication. The truth is often considered a Common Good. She seems to have little care for the long-term, as her insurrection was unsuccessful and she herself is caught and hanged. Because she is focused upon the Common Good, and Task-Focused, she has been sorted as a Ravenclaw.

Finally, the hardest case is that Regan is a Hufflepuff. This is harder, but not impossible to defend. Regan clearly cares for her husband, in a personal way we do not see with Goneril. When he is injured during her torture of Gloucester, she is moved both to sadness and anger. She is defensive of her retinue, and even her Father, when he allows her to be. She is not active in the scheming, but reactive to it, and this makes her a bit of a pawn. While she gets a little more play than Hufflepuffs do in the books, her defense of her own can get a bit extreme, as we see with Gloucester. She does seem focused on the Common Good as she sees it (or at least does not defy the rules without someone else's encouragement) and she definitely does not have the imagination for schemes and treachery that her sister does, even basing her own flattery on her sisters. Most of her negative actions, indeed, are just responses to what Goneril has done. Because of this, she can grudgingly be classified as being motivated by the Common Good, and is definitely more Goal Oriented than focused on the tasks required.

The characters do fit the Hogwarts Houses. There is a clear delineation of where they belong and who goes where. The divisions are sound, and should adequately divide a group

of four into the personalities and motivations of the characters, allowing readers to examine them not just for their role in the story or their proximity to the protagonist, but for their individual guiding principles and their role in the ensemble.

## V. Implications

The four characters do roughly fit the four Hogwarts Houses, but it is nowhere near as inarguable as I had hoped for. It is defensible, and I still believe that the theory is good, but this is not the best test case for the study. Most of my previously examined cases were more modern works, and perhaps the rules and conventions of the time do not match the Houses as well as another set of four, like the elements or the humours. There is more to be done here.

If this ends up being a valid theory, it could have many implications. It could create, similar to Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, a template for future writing of serial ensemble fiction. Characters could be fully fleshed, rather than having the placeholders (like Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw) being mere shadows of characters. It could also allow for a new understanding of why we tell stories, and the realism of character relationships that parallel the human relationships they are imitating. It could also allow for a better lens to understand and shade the telling of the stories that may have become trite or less powerful by their repetition.

### V. 1. Foundation

The intentions of many movements and examinations of literary analysis is to derive meaning in a new way. This allows us to examine the finite number of stories in a way that contains multitudes, introducing new stories based purely on perspective. This is the true long term goal of this work. The goal of this work is to establish a paradigm for examination of current works by establishing a new lens through which to frame them.

In the Harry Potter books, the Houses are something you are. You are a Gryffindor, guided by bravery and heroism. You are a Hufflepuff, guided by caring for others. There are two further important developments to be made to this thinking before we can have something that works for people and proper storytelling analysis. People are too complex to be described adequately by a single descriptor, no matter how dynamic or thoughtful. We learned that with Jung's archetypes, with the multitude of personality tests, and with the Houses. Outside of a small, controlled, and limited situations, the idea of these descriptors crumbled. The same is not true for actions.

Actions can be heroic, ambitious, focused on others, or expanding your experiences. Actions can be limited in the fashions that the Houses are. While a person can never be always one thing, as even Hufflepuffs need a break from selflessness, an action can always be narrowed to a singular value. Actions can be representative of the whole, while not becoming a solely defining trait. Just as Ron was often a thoughtless jerk to Harry and Hermione, he was also, and even more often, driven by heroism.

Even this is not far enough in literary value, or for the purpose of future work. Actions can be the same, but differentiated by the motivations behind the action. A calculated self-sacrifice based in ambition is not the same as a genuinely thoughtless and heroic one. Learning a new skill or trying a new food because it makes a loved one happy is not the same as experiencing it for one's own seeking of knowledge. The motivation is where the real Houses lie, and the most important meanings within them.

The Houses must, for best utility, progress through parts of speech. They begin, in the Harry Potter books, as nouns. He is a Slytherin, ambitious and cold. She is a Gryffindor, heedless of danger. They are who you are, a definition that goes beyond trait or activity. To gain utility in literature, they must first become verbs, an action one takes. She Hufflepuffed to

him, soothing his hurts. She Ravenclawed that test, using her vast knowledge to dominate it. Finally, they must become adverbs, the way that we accomplish actions. Her approach was Gryffindorian, dramatic and courageous, challenging the judge on his unfairness. Despite his apparent cruelty, his purposes were Hufflepuffian, as the only way that he would get better would be to be told the truth.

This would allow a character to be a sum of motivation and action, which allows for a depth of character beyond being simply defined by role or vocation, as most of the sorting methods currently employed use. In the next and final section of the thesis, I will detail the values that this lens will allow for creating meaning, as well as a few proper applications of the work.

## V. 2. Application

The direct applications of the ideas in this thesis are easiest directed in analysis, creation, and editing.

Analysis can be done as a simple classification or as a more particular set of examination criteria. The simplest analysis can be useful for education on classification and literary theory. It can be a fun thought exercise for a group of people to attempt to determine the House of a group of characters. This improves analytical observation, argumentation, and challenge to and editing of literary hypotheses. The more complex analysis could allow for one to more adequately and roundly define alternate motivations of more mysterious or underdeveloped characters. Knowing that a character acts consistently as a Gryffindor could allow a reader to guess at their underlying motivation in a more complete way than simply assuming based on the actions.

A deeper analysis can differentiate and diversify types of stories. Most adventure stories up to this point have Gryffindor protagonists, people who react instead of thinking, who sacrifice others readily, who lead with courage and talent, rather than hard work or

ambition. Imagine a Slytherin Harry Potter, who raises the Slytherin into the leaders that they should have been, uniting Hogwarts against Voldemort through tactical planning and respect for his subordinates, replacing the misplaced loyalty to Voldemort and parents to a true leader. Imagine a Hufflepuff Potter, working tirelessly to support someone like Neville as they tirelessly fight off the depredations of the Death Eaters, having joined Hermione, Ron, and Draco in friendship in that first tense encounter and showing everyone the power of love that had saved him in his first encounter with Voldemort. Imagine a Ravenclaw Potter, who was prepared for all the tasks set before him, using research and rationale instead of simple verve and luck, knowing to avoid the many traps set before him and building an infrastructure and proof to defeat the Dark Lord's attempted incursions, rather than keeping all of the relevant details among a bunch of people ignorant of the support of others. Would the plot have to be reworked a little to allow for differing conflict? Yes. But are they any less compelling?

Creation of characters can be streamlined through the House system, as well. Having dynamic templates can allow for the creation of a deeper character than simply assigning a role to a character. It can be a middle ground between the long character biographies that may not even be used, allowing for a character to have some fascinating details about them that never explicitly came out until after the books (like being gay). Knowing that a character's primary motivation is control, or care, or heroism, or pursuit of knowledge, can be incredibly useful when determining the initial and continuing dynamics for writing the characters. It allows a skeleton key of motivation, always having something to fall back on when a character is written into a new situation.

This skeleton key can also be used by an editor to correct a writer who has gone astray. Sometimes, writers lose track of the direction of a character and will use them in a capacity that doesn't suit them. Rather than having to fully understand all of the backstory

that may exist in the architecture of the world that lives in the authors head, the editor can have a cheat sheet. If a character who has always been a caregiver is suddenly trading orphans for security, it can be a red flag to allow editors to correct the course. It can also be a way to examine the direction that one might want to go in the future, knowing that character dynamics can be

## Appendix: Two Axis Systems

It can be difficult to quantify lots of information into a specific and understandable form, especially for people who do not have a background in academia. Many people are uncomfortable with mathematical concepts, and therefore dislike quantitative measurements in general, especially in the fields of language and literature (citation needed). As such, bringing a quantitative and experimental display settings may seem counterintuitive, but the truth is actually the opposite. While qualitative measures are slippery and easy to support from multiple directions, they also have trouble representing values without resorting to very broad strokes. There are too many things that can be defined by the slippery variables to actually create a sorting system. When one gets down to it, though, one has to find a smallest place, where things are defined, where things are clearly one thing or another, to establish a foundation. The purpose of this chapter is to explain why I chose this particular metric for defining the complicated differences between the Houses and why this grapheme best represents the data as I want it.

For a complex collection of data, there is such a thing as starting too simply. A binary measure such as on or off, right or wrong, or even good or evil, will not work for representing the diversity of characters. There are too many shades in between. Nor will the binary that is currently attempted by our American political system. Even the continuum that better represents our modern campaigns (She is more conservative than he, he is more liberal than

she, etc.) is not enough to create a thoughtful bounding of the characteristics and philosophies of a group. A certain level of sophistication is required when trying to map the bounds of all literary characters (even in two works, as we are doing here), and that sophistication requires more than a singular linear representation of data.

When I was teaching math, the transition from two dimensional shapes to three dimensional shapes was a rough one. Even though students could wrap their head around the idea of something existing in three dimensions, faced with the reality, they had trouble understanding it. This became even worse when we tried to quantify it. They could understand how much bigger a unit (like feet or meters) was squared, but cubed was just too much for most of my students. This is where the value of a two-unit system comes in.

A two unit system maps a set of variables onto a two-dimensional plane. It allows for a wide range of values to be mapped on that plane, allowing for a consistent visualization scheme without sacrificing understandability. Using the political spectrum introduced by the website Political Compass, one can examine a two variable system that allows for significant variance by individuals ([politicalcompass.com](http://politicalcompass.com)). One of the most important things about this system is that it's not necessarily binary. There are multiple possible slottings on each axis and between each extreme. This allows for one to not only be a die-hard extremist on either position, but to lean a certain way or even be exactly in the middle. Very few people are exactly in the middle.

There are some limitations to the Two Axis system, however. As it has only two dimensions, you can only map two variables. Any more complexity would require something much more visually difficult to understand. So, the complexity offered by the Meyers-Briggs tests could not be represented on a Two Axis system. Similarly, one has to find the axes which the four groupings turn on, which can be very difficult. Finally, there are those people

who are in the middle, committed to neither extreme or unwilling to commit to a single ideology. Tribalism generally calls people to one direction or another, but there are some few who will not be sortable, or who will be between two quadrants. It is perhaps ironic that there is a literary equivalent of this in J. K. Rowlings 'Hatstalls' which will come up later.

For all its limitations and lack of complexity, I believe that this level of system will be the most accessible to the most people, and allow for the easiest explanation of a fairly large and complex amount of data. The spectrum nature of the system will allow for people to avoid the oversimplification of binary questions and is more likely to work as an indicator than other methods. ed.

## Appendix: Origins of Thesis

This thesis started as a road trip discussion. My wife and her friends were working at conventions to supplement their income and I was working overnights and going to school. In Texas, the distances are long, and I wanted to be with my wife, so I would drive her to the locations of these conventions, often four hours away, then while she was working, I would work on my school stuff.

When everyone was awake, since I couldn't read, we would engage in long and diverting debates about which mythical world we'd want to live in, what superpower we would have, and whether we would accept gifts from gods or aliens. These and several other deep questions would spur debate long into the interminable car rides, and people would often come back the next ride with further information to better argue their points. It became a sort of Cheshire Cheese club for modern popular culture, though there were many divergences that couldn't be adequately argued because not all were familiar with the source material.

One of the only things that all of our friends had in common was Harry Potter, though they also all consumed various forms of pop culture. Somehow, we decided to sort the



teenage mutant ninja turtles into Harry Potter Houses. It was revelatory. We then began sorting other things. Anime characters, sitcom characters, people in the car; no one was off limits from being sorted.

The arguments were unstructured at first. If one could make a comparison or tie an outside character to the likeness of one of the official Harry Potter characters, that counted. Eventually, it became more stratified, based on the words of the author, the lines in the books and movies, and eventually, the sorting system, which went through several drafts. I was properly obsessed with the subject for a while, seeking out my harshest critics to challenge my ideas and to test my theories. With their help and earnest, if occasionally dismissive, criticism, I created the sorting system that is discussed in this paper.

It wasn't until I argued with a new colleague that I also regularly argued with about narratology, literary theory, and the state of the author (dead or god) that I realized that the sorting system might have literary value. With his regular incisive criticism, the axes were created and the questions were formed.

## Appendix: Other Four Man Groups

The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were my first four man band. The cool, but in control leader, Leonardo, was a Slytherin, always having a plan, and always in charge. The rebellious loner, Raphael was the Griffyndor, always acting without thinking, and coming off looking like a hero. Donatello was definitely a Ravenclaw, always seeking knowledge and making cool stuff. Finally, Michaelangelo, the party dude, was the Hufflepuff, the heart of the group, who always kept everyone together, despite their frustration with each other.

Star Wars, despite having six major characters, had four central character and two sidekicks. The main characters are Luke, Leia, Han, and R2D2, with Chewbacca being Han's sidekick and C3P0 being R2D2's sidekick. My thoughts on this sorting are controversial, but

hear me out. Luke was a Ravenclaw. He just wanted to go do new things and see new places. Much of his early character was bemoaning his lack of experiences, and he was a constantly increasing curve when it came to learning. Leia was a Slytherin. Despite already being a princess, in a position of power, she was working to overthrow the government. She defied Darth Vader to his face, and even resisted drugs. She also played Han and Luke against each other romantically. Han was a Hufflepuff. This is why he was such a terrible smuggler and didn't just leave at the end of the first Star Wars movie. He was constantly doing stuff for friends that did not benefit him personally. He was a big old marshmallow. Finally, R2D2 was always doing thoughtlessly heroic stuff, carrying messages to escaped Jedi knights and hacking into secure facilities, at great personal risk and thinking of no one's safety at all. R2D2 was the most heroic character in the series, always charging off and doing the right thing, even when it made life hard for others.

For the Marvel Cinematic Universe's Avengers, the Band of Four also works. Thor is the Hufflepuff, constantly making new friends and forgiving old enemies. His relationship with his brother alone demonstrates his unfailing loyalty and willingness to sacrifice for others. The Hulk is a Gryffindor, constantly acting without thinking and attempting to smash his way out of the many problems his lack of thinking causes, always assuming that he knows more than others. Iron Man is a Ravenclaw who is constantly attempting to learn more and to do better. Many would characterize him as a Slytherin, but the fact is that he doesn't want control and just doesn't have enough ambition to be a Slytherin. He's not trying to be the best. He just wants to be better than he was before. Finally, and many people argue against this, but Captain America is the Slytherin. When audiences first meet Captain America, he's lying. He goes to multiple recruitment centers to attempt to enter the army. He constantly outwits those around him, and when competing with multiple others, whether for promotion

or in battle, he uses any means to win. Even his classic 'On your left' shows his competitive streak, with the ambition to be better clearly showing through.

## Appendix: Literary Shorthand

Literary shorthand is ubiquitous in modern writing. Because we have such a canon to build from, it is normal and usual to avoid citing every one of the many schema and resource that we pull our modern information from. In most media, a nodding reference is worth far more than an acknowledged homage. There are several comedies and cartoons directly based on simply referencing the material that is popular at the time. This kind of literary shorthand is included in media far back into the past.

Shakespeare had many nodding references to other playwrights at the time, though many of the allusions are lost to the modern audiences. There are bits that seem nonsensical or crude unless one researches the culture of the time. Some plays seem directly in response to others, with *Merchant of Venice* and *The Jew of Malta* seemingly discussing the same tired trope. *Romeo and Juliet* was also shockingly similar to *Troilus and Cressida*.

More modern shorthands include the color of cowboy hats in Westerns (white hat for the good guy, black for the bad). This is such a pervasive trope that the terms were adopted for hacker terminology, with people who work for law and order being called white hat hackers, while the rogue element are referred to as black hat hackers. A character with glasses will usually be intelligent. A supporting character who talks about his plans for his upcoming retirement is doomed to die to show how real things are getting. High heels generally imply power or a certain ambiguity of character. There are numerous literary shorthands out there to let us know exactly what is happening without the author having to say too much.

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